Tells the Facts and Names the Names

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CLINTON'S LOUSY JUDGES

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The Truth at Last!

"Democracy is a desirable form of government, but it's not necessarily the most efficient form of government."

Ron Leven
J.P. Morgan "currency strategist"

How They Fixed The Star Wars Test

After pledging to veto this year's Pentagon budget, on October 25 Bill Clinton obediently put his name to $267.7 billion worth of waste and theft. Included in this immense sum is no less than $3.3 billion for ballistic missile defense research and development. Nothing so clearly summarises Bill Clinton's abject surrender to the Pentagon and its congressional/industrial partners throughout his tenure than his support of thes Star Wars program. Launched by Ronald Reagan in 1983, this baroque endeavor has to date consumed some $55 billion, with no discernible result. Clinton is now endeavoring to persuade the Russians to "amend" the anti-ballistic missile treaty, which explicitly forbids a star wars system of the type currently under development, by invoking the putative menace of North Korean and Iranian missiles raining down on North America, or Russia. The Russians have rejected his proposal out of hand.

It should go without saying that the U.S. will never produce a workable anti-missile defense system, since the technical obstacles are insuperable, but Clinton is too ignorant or timid to acknowledge the fact. Hence, on October 14, the President declared: " I do think it is the responsible thing to do to continue to pursue what appears to be far more promising than many had thought — including me a few years ago — in terms of missile defense."

The "promising" features of Star Wars are hard to find, unless Clinton, like many other credulous souls, was taken in by the shrieks of triumph from the Pentagon following a National Missile Defense test on October 2. In the test, an "Exoatmospheric Kill Vehicle" (EKV) fired from Kwajalein Island in the South Pacific managed to hit a re-entry vehicle launched on an ICBM from Vandenberg AFB in California. Deferential press reports spoke of this supreme achievement in "hitting a bullet with a bullet", and even professional quotewright John Pike of the Federation of American Scientists, who has ridden high on Star Wars critiques, agreed that the military had achieved "the equivalent of shooting a hole-in-one".

An internal assessment from inside a Pentagon agency, supplied by a Friend of CounterPunch, tells a very different story. Short of roping the interceptor and its target together, the architects of this $100 million exercise could hardly have done more to ensure the success of the operation. As the assessment (summarised by our friend as "how operationally meaningful the test was not") notes: "*Because the ICBM was launched from California toward the mid-Pacific Ocean — an outbound trajectory instead of the inbound trajectory of an ICBM attack — the (beefed up early warning radar) in California acquired the target at close range with high signal-to-noise. In a real ICBM attack the radar would have had to detect the target at long range with low signal-to-noise.*" In other words, the radar had a much better opportunity to spot the target because it was leaving from right next door instead of approaching from far over the horizon.

"*The re-entry vehicle (RV — ie the target) was tracked by an on- board C-band beacon and GPS. Ground track radars were neither needed nor used to guide the EKV.*" This means that the target was conveniently broadcasting its position both

(**Star Wars,** *continued on page 6*)

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Our Little Secrets

Death Race 2000

The week of October 17-23 was National NonViolence Week, bringing with it a homily-filled proclamation on the virtues of tolerance, prevention and forgiveness from President Clinton and a 2-day conference in DC entitled Voices Against Violence featuring speeches from members of congress and governors. As an example of the intellectual and moral hypocrisy of Washington note the following: the week after the conference five inmates on death row were scheduled to be executed: Anthony Bryan (Florida), Domingo Cantu (Texas, the 105th in Gov. Bush's tenure), Ignacio Ortiz (Arizona), Michael Williams (Virginia) and Richard Johnson (South Carolina). If all of these executions go forward it will bring the total to 86 for the year, the most since 1954. The Death Penalty Information Center estimates that there will be more than 100 execution by year's end.

Al Gore has recently begun touting his own credentials as a proponent of the federal death penalty. The following can be found on the Gore 2000 website: "As a senator, Al Gore helped win Senate passage of tough anti-crime legislation; as vice-president, he helped win enactment of the first federal death penalty in 30 years. As president, Al Gore would: insure strong enforcement of the existing tough penalties for violent crime, including the the federal death penalty..." The website also includes a quote from Gore on crime and punishment: "We're funding 100,000 new community police, and fighting for up to 50,000 more—and I believe that should be just the beginning. We funded 100,000 new prison cells, and expanded the death penalty. Criminals don't laugh at the legal system."

As evidence of just how fervently the Clinton/Gore team believes in the death penalty, in early October the Solicitor General submitted a brief to the Supreme Court making the Clinton/Gore administration's argument for why the court should not hear a case challenging death sentences handed down against people who committed crimes as children.

Now Bill Bradley is joining the death penalty chorus. Like Gore, he also sings his full support for hate crime legislation, the only real purpose of which is to "enhance penalties"—meaning it's not punishment enough to impose life without parole for "hate" murders (as opposed to all those genteel killings that don't fit the category); only death will do. On this issue we now have the spectacle of Gore and Bradley duelling to out law-and-order George W. Bush. Bush does not support federal hate crime legislation, they say, thus he must support hate crimes. Texas has its own version of a hate crime law, and also operates the most efficient death machine in the country, but for the Democratic contenders the pursuit of vengeance must never rest.

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Dems in Blackface

After Missouri Democrats asserted that Republican Senator John Ashcroft was a racist for sabotaging the nomination of a black judge to the federal district court, the GOP peddled to the press a 39-year-old photo of the state's Democratic governor, Mel Carnahan, in blackface. Carnahan is challenging Ashcroft for his senate seat in 2000.

The photo published in the Oct. 12, 1960 edition of the Rolla Daily News shows Carnahan, his brother and two other men performing songs in blackface at a Kiwanis Club dinner. Carnahan was 26 at the time. A year later Carnahan's father became the first US ambassador to Sierra Leone and, at the request of Carnahan and his brother, the Kiwanis Club discontinued its tradition of minstrel shows.

The pic of Carnahan in blackface was unearthed by operatives for Ashcroft, the Missouri republican who blocked the nomination of Ronnie Lee to a federal judgeship. Lee was the first black on the Missouri supreme court. Ashcroft supposedly scuttled Lee's nomination because the judge had raised questions about the constitutionality of the death penatly. But there have been accusations that the racists in the senate are coming out of the cloakroom. The sinking of Lee was swiftly followed by Jesse Helms' noisome remarks about Carole Moseley-Braun, whose nomination as ambassador to New Zealand the North Carolina senator vowed to mothball.

Clinton wore an Afro wig and did a song with a group calling themselves "the Boogies".

Carnahan has apologized profusely for his 40-year old racist skit, saying that he regretted his "participation in this kind of theater" and that he'd "grown a lot since 1960". And his record on civil rights as governor has been pretty good. Still Carnahan must be scratching his head over how differently his racist behavior was treated compared with President Bill Clinton's similar behavior only a couple of years ago.

At a 1997 party on Martha's Vineyard, Clinton decorated himself with Afro wig and hammed up a musical routine with a group calling themselves "the Boogies". Clinton never apologized for the act and the White House press office has successfully kept a photo of the event out of the newspapers.

Clinton's Judges

As we roll towards Presidential 2000 we confidently await the usual frantic alarums that unless we pull the Democratic lever the Republicans will cram the judi-

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ciary with enemies of all that we hold dear. CounterPunchers snoozing in the arms of summer may have missed the August l issue of Judicature, featuring interesting research by professors Sheldon Goldman and Elliot Slotnick. They reviewed Clinton's appointments to the federal bench. Big surprise. Clinton has:drawn more from large establishment law firms than either Reagan or Bush; favored more prosecutors than did Bush; favored lawyers richer and less politically active than did Bush, Reagan or Carter; favored lawyers older than did Reagan or Bush. Nearly half of Clinton's appointments to the US courts of appeal were federal trial court judges appointed by Reagan or Bush. Two other studies are of similar interest. Prof. Robert Carp of the University of Houston concludes that Clinton's first term appointments were about as liberal as President Ford's (though surely not as liberal as Ford's magnificent pick for the US Supreme Court, Stevens) and not much different from Reagan's or Bush's. And Texas Lawyer, another journal, reports that George W. Bush does not query possible appointees to the state bench about their views on abortion, school prayer, affirmative action or guns.

Doris, Must You?

"In a sense, the American people were right to be fascinated with the idea of the Kennedys. Whereas the typical American family was nuclear in structure, with each individual finding his own way, the Kennedys had done some basic thinking about themselves as a family, and that thinking had produced a series of rituals and mechanisms that kept them together...And as the family expanded and accepted new members, there was no ritual stronger than a wedding to reiterate the bonds of family, loyalty, and faith ". This piece of effusive claptrap is from Doris Kearns Goodwin's foreword to Kennedy Weddings, an impending addition to the library of effusive claptrap about the holy family. Come on Doris! Would Arthur Schlesinger Jr sink this low?

Those Police Deaths

Every time a cop gets shot in the line of duty we see the equivalent of a state funeral, the rhetorical trappings of which are intended to convey that the folk in blue live lives of peculiar danger and that each time a cop blows someone away for no good reason, we should bear in mind that

"Police officers are [eight times] more likely to commit suicide than to be killed in a homicide."

his finger had sound reasons to be itchy on the trigger. Not so long ago we offered here figures from 1993 to show that this is all nonsense. Miners and farm-workers have riskier occupations. So do fishermen. Dr Roger Barnes, a sociologist at the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio , Texas has kindly sent us figures, from 1996, which make the point even more strongly. In that year there were 663,535 cops in the country, and an even 100 were killed in the line of duty, 55 feloniously and 45 accidentally. This yields a death rate per 100,000 of 15. Of these 100 deaths, 32 came in the form of car or motorcycle crashes, constituting the largest category of police deaths.

In that same year, the highest rate by industry was of coal-mining, at a rate per 100,000 of 39.8. As an occupation, taxi-driving was more than four times riskier than police work, which was almost exactly as dangerous in terms of homicide, as bering a sales counter clerk. A lively publication out of Portland, Oregon, called Peoples Police Report quotes a 1997 Rap Sheet (newsletter of the Portland Police Association) as reporting that the highest number of deaths of active police is by suicide: "Police officers are [eight times] more likely to commit suicide than to be killed in a homicide, and three times more likely to commit suicide than to die in job-related accidents."

In the US an average of around 17 workers die each day from unsafe conditions, and around 35,000 a day are injured. Who calls them heroes? Who gets charged for their murders? Perhaps the upcoming hearings on cultural decline for which Senator Sam Brownback is such an enthusiastic proponent can consider a sesssion on this question of what constitutes true heroism in our society. It would take him away from the tedious issue of videogames. According to the Manhattan Mercury of Kansas, Brownback is promoting the work of retired Lt Col David Grossman who has prepared an exhausting 140-minute video on such games as Quake and Duke Nukem, saying, in the words of the Mercury's reporter Mary Spiro Lavin, that the kids are learning "the same type of violent skills learned in military training — except without any of the built-in safeguards".

According to an ally of Grossman, Pastor Will Griswold, in Army training there are targets you're not supposed to hit, "like the woman carrying the bag of groceries". Presumably Griswold advises parents to prevent their children from watching footage of dead civilian bodies consequent upon the bombing of Iraq or Serbia. One more reason to applaud Gov. Jesse Ventura, who said, apropos the Tailhook scandal, that if you train people to be killers, you shouldn't be outraged if they behave like killers. He could be the star of the Brownback heartings.

Z-Pinch

"A simple theoretical concept to solve the staggeringly difficult problem of maintaining intact electrical transmission lines around rapid-fire, laboratory-produced thermonuclear explosions has been proposed by Sandia researchers." So begins a strange article in the newsletter LabNews, produced by the Sandia National Laboratories. The story, titled Rapid-fire Thermonuclear Explosions for Z Pinches May Be Possible, details how the scientists at Sandia plan to ask Congress for substantial funding to keep the lab's so-called Z Pinch Accelerator in operation. The plan, hatched by Tom Hunter, Sandia's VP for Nuclear Weapons program, is to get the Z Pinch listed as "a potential source of fusion energy", allowing Sandia to tap into the deep aquifer of DOE funding. The men from Sandia even suggest that the Z Pinch could be eventually be used "to produce energy not only on Earth but also in spacecraft or in space colonies, since its power source—isotopes of hydrogen—for the most part is readily available".

The prose here is almost impenetrable, but buried in the following sentences is the real goal of this scheme. "After the firing, or shot, the then-liquefied lithium or flibe would be pushed out of the chamber and its heat used to drive electrical generators. Tritium, an isotope of hydrogen essential for the fusion process, would be harvested from the liquefied metal." Of course, tritium, of which the US is predicting a shortage, is the essential ingredient for the manufacturing of hyrdogen bombs. **CP**

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Nike Chronicles

20 Cents an Hour? *It's the Market*

On October 4, USA Today ran a long (for it) story by Julie Schmit on Nike's operations in Vietnam. The gist of the article was that the shoemaker had learned its lesson, repented for its sins and was now nearly as vigilant a protector of worker rights as a former smoker is of indoor air quality. The story glossed over the pitiful wages and grueling work conditions at Nike factories and recruited some of the company's former critics to vouch for its reformed ways.

Alas! Whenever Nike executives are quoted they inevitably indict themselves. For example, the article noted that while the Oregon-based company pays retired Chicago Bull Michael Jordan $25 million a year to push its shoes and attire, it pays its factory workers less than 20 cents an hour. USA Today noted that Jordan's yearly take to pitch its shoes was more than Nike "paid 35,000 workers for making them".

A Nike executive rationalized the disparity in terms notable for their frankness. "We have to pay Michael Jordan what the market dictates because he sells shoes for us", said Chris Helzer, Nike's manager for corporate responsibility in Vietnam. "We pay workers this amount because that's the market."

Every time Nike gets cornered, it trots out a fresh troupe of defenders. First it was Andrew Young and Spike Lee. Now the flacks of choice appear to be Dara O'Rouke, an environmental researcher at Cal Berkeley, Steve Koenig, of the Seattle-based outfit Informed Investors, and Medea Benjamin, director of the San Francisco-based Global Exchange. Benjamin once again reiterated her contention that Nike had made "an astounding transformation." To be fair, Benjamin conceded that Nike still has a long way to go on the issue of wages.

But even on the issue of toxics, the situation at Nike factories in Indonesia is far from rosy. CounterPunch talked to Vergil Bushnell, of the Multinationals Resource Center, who had just returned from Indonesia where he had interviewed Nike workers at the Nikomas factory.

One of the workers interviewed by Bushnell was an operator at the Rubber Chemical Compound building, where soles for athletic shoes are made. For more than a year this worker, a union member, has led daily talks with managers of the plant over workplace conditions and exposure to chemicals. The worker described the talks as "largely ineffective" and said that managers have repeatedly made promises they have not fulfilled, such as frequent check-ups and free milk, which the workers believe help them with their symptoms.

Workers inside the chemical plant are provided with little protection, only a cloth mask and gloves. They are made to work in blue short-sleeved shirts. The workers told Bushnell that the mask doesn't prevent them from inhaling chemical powders and many workers suffer frequent chemical burns and skin rashes. Over the past two months, the Nike worker told Bushnell, there have been two cases of workers spitting up blood and two workers' necks turned black. Many workers get a "red, pimply skin rash" on their arms. One worker developed bronchitis after a chemical exposure and, the worker said, a liquid at the plant has been linked to hair loss among workers.

Workers only have scant trust in the Nikomas clinic. They say the medicine "is very cheap and doesn't solve anything". Workers who suffer from the skin rash are given two days off and a lotion. Workers who cough up blood are given chest x-rays and sent home for two days.

Other workers told Bushnell that the Nikomas plant incinerates thousands of "B-grade" shoes on-site, thus exposing workers to toxic emissions.

There's an easy way to determine that the USA Today story was a put-up job by Nike and its new cohorts. Simply look at who Schmit chose not to interview: namely, Thuyen Nguyen, of Vietnam/Labor Watch, and Jeff Ballinger of Press for Change. After Nguyen last visited Vietnam and came back with a savage report on the company's practices there, Joseph Ha, Nike vice-president, tried to get the Vietnamese government to bar him from returning to the country.

The new Nike is still run by the same old hands. The long-time head of Nike's operations in Vietnam is George Southrey, a former officer in the US Army's Special Forces. In the 1980s, Southrey ran a spying operation for Nike. He hired snitches to go into Nike factories to determine if workers were "selling shoes out the back door".

The long-time head of Nike's operations in Vietnam is George Southrey, a former officer in the US Army's Special Forces.

Nike has shown a marked preference for totalitarian regimes that cater to its whims and keep workers in line. At the same time it is expanding production in Vietnam and China, Nike is closing down plants in the Philippines, a more democratic regime where labor unions are free to organize workers.

As Benjamin was extolling Nike's metamorphosis, John Keady was telling students at Notre Dame University about NIke's darker side and its insidious contractual relationships with universities. Keady was the assistant soccer coach at St. John's University in New York. The St. Johns team wore Nike uniforms and shoes. But Keady, who had written his masters thesis on Nike's human rights abuses in Asia, refused to don Swoosh-adorned apparel. Keady publicly criticized the university for its association with the company, which he calls "one of the grossest violators of human rights in the world". Keady said that through its association with Nike St. Johns (and other universities) was "giving a stamp of approval to this type of behavior.

"I was told to wear Nike and drop the issue publicly or resign," says Keady. Keady quit. **CP**

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CounterPunch

October 26, 1999

To our subscribers from Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair

Dear Friends,

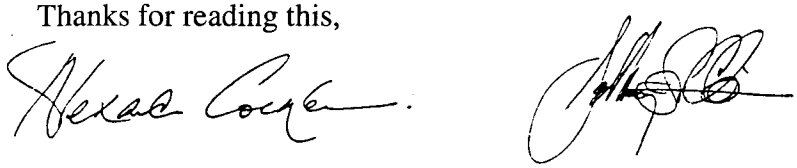
Once a year around this time we ask you for extra support for CounterPunch if you can afford it. There's nothing either of us would rather do than put out this newsletter. We love doing it, but that doesn't mean that it isn't a tough struggle to pay all the bills. And these bills are getting bigger, even though we've never raised our basic subscription rate.

You're literally getting double the newsletter you used to two years ago. This year alone we've added two extra pages to almost every issue, and during the war against Serbia we ran special ten-page editions for a couple of months. We printed thousands of extra copies of these and shipped them to peace groups across the country. The enthusiastic response from activists was very exciting, but in terms of our budget it left us financially almost out of breath.

We notice that many of you are choosing the two-year option when you renew your subscriptions. This tells us that you are an exceptionally loyal bunch and that you like what we're doing. We certainly think CounterPunch is living up to our hopes when we founded it six years ago, restoring the honor of radical muckraking, putting out a newsletter that breaks new ground, has edge, is fun to read, offers a political roadmap you can trust. Take our cover story in this issue. There's not another publication in America, in the entire world for that matter, which has got hold of that damning internal Pentagon assessment of the Star Wars test that made all those gullible headlines back at the start of October. Another example: a few weeks ago the New York Times ran a big story saying a Pentagon-ordered vaccine may have been the cause of Gulf War Syndrome. CounterPunch subscribers got that story two years ago.

But we won't go on blowing our own trumpet. You know what you've been getting. Our purpose here is to stress a stark reality. We don't have a battery of big foundations staking us, or platoons of big donors on permanent stand-by. We rely on the support of you, our readers, first with your subscriptions, and then with whatever extra support you feel you can muster.

Thanks for reading this,



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Clinton's Sham Plan for Roadless Areas

Saving Forests or Saving Al Gore?

It's been billed as the greatest act of land preservation since Teddy Roosevelt created the national forests. On October 13 Bill Clinton made his way, by helicopter and SUV, to the George Washington forest in the Shenandoah mountains, where he disclosed his plan to protect 40 million acres of roadless land in national forests across the country. Amid the ecstatic cheers of environmentalists bussed to the site by the National Audubon Society Clinton declared that "in the end we're going to protect all this", gesturing as he spoke to the surrounding trees.

Those cheering environmentalists should have been warned by Clinton's means of transportation to the great event. The first great flaw in his plan is that it appears to prohibit road-building, but not logging. These days helicopter logging is becoming increasingly common as a way of extracting the trees from the cut-over terrain to the nearest available road.

Logging won't be banned it seems.Nor will livestock grazing, mining or dirt bikes. Even on its face the plan falls short of protecting all roadless areas. Steve Kelly, a feisty green organizer in Montana, had it right when he said of the plan, "The president tried to redefine sex, now he's trying to redefine wilderness." There are around 60 million acres of unexploited forest under federal supervision and Clinton's plan applies to only 40 million of them. More than half the area covered by the Clinton plan is composed of "rocks and ice", with no trees. By contrast, the 20 million acres that have been excluded are mostly forested terrain.

So it's scarcely surprising that Patti Rodgers, spokesperson for the Willamette National Forest, for decades the top timber-producing forest in the country, commented on the plan that it would have "very little" effect on logging in that forest, an assessment that was foreshadowed by Clinton himself in his speech when he said, "It's very important to point out that we are not trying to turn our national forests into museums". The Forest Service calculates that under the plan timber harvests will decline by only about 28 million board feet. The annual take from national forests is 4 billion board feet.

Another huge defect in the plan is the apparent omission from its purview of the largest (and most ecologically intact) national forest in the country, the Tongass in Alaska, thus deferring to the political power of Senator Ted Stevens. This brings us to the real intent of the plan, which has little to do with preservation and everything to do with the politics of the next year.

The administration could have protected all these same acres, and more, by simple executive order. But instead, the Clinton plan calls for the development of an environmental impact statement that is not scheduled to be completed before the end of next year. Now,federal courts have ruled exactly as common sense would dictate: that such impact statements are not needed in the case of straightforward preservation. So what's afoot? The long process of review — probably eighteen months — means that the executor of the plan will be the next president. What better way to congeal support for Al Gore, with leaders of the major green groups presaging a forest holocaust if George W. Bush wins the White House?

The announcement of the plan comes at a moment when Gore sorely needs to buttress his credibility with environmentalists. It's only a few weeks since Gore said he was "personally wounded" by the decision of Friends of the Earth to endorse Gore's rival for the Democratic nomination, Bill Bradley. Clinton took good care in his speech in the Shenandoah mountains to emphasize that the plan's architect was Gore, along with George Frampton, head of the government's Council on Environmental Quality.

Frampton (the man Gore asked to be his lawyer amid the campaign funding scandal) was once head of the Wilderness Society, with Richard Hoppe as his right-hand man. These days Hoppe is one of the leaders of the Heritage Forest Campaign, the group that has most actively promoted the roadless area initiative, although the word "group" is somewhat misleading since the Heritage Forest Campaign has no membership, but only a substantial staff paid for by the Pew Charitable Trusts, which has committed $1.4 million to the roadless area campaign.

Thus we have Pew, the richest and most influential foundation in the environmental sector, creating the Heritage Forest "group" to advance a politically motivated initiative in an election year. Staffers of the Heritage Forest Campaign have been telling grass roots environmental organizers to refrain from public criticism of the plan. "It is VITAL," ran an October 11 e-mail from Heritage Forest to grass root activists in the Pacific Northwest, "that we respond immediately to early news reports of this effort with praise and consensus... if not, we jeopardize the whole deal."

So if the plan is to be called Clinton's green legacy, it will be in the unflattering sense of a legacy that testifies to what the mainstream environmental movement has become: a wholly owned subsidiary of the DNC. As Oregon Democratic rep Peter diFazio put it in the wake of Clinton's Shenandoah speech, "I would say that forest policy is too serious to be the theme of the day in some attempt to boost Gore's flagging presidential campaign, which is what I think it's all about." **CP**

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via the radar beacon and the Global Positioning System, enabling the testers to guide the interceptor, as our friend puts it "into the basket". The Ballistic Missile Defense Office (BMDO) swears blind that these useful aids were not employed to steer the EKV interceptor right up to its final collision with the target. Oh no! Most certainly not! The target and its killer were merely steered "near" to each other before the $20 million EKV made whatever final adjustments were necessary using its own guidance system before closing for a 15,000 mph impact, generating a deadly shower of press releases across the northern hemisphere.

"*The only penetration aid in the target suite was a large balloon. Because the large balloon had a significantly higher infrared signature than the RV, it allowed the EKV to acquire the target complex at long range and it was easy to discriminate from the RV.*" A "penetration aid" is a decoy, and Star Wars critics have long postulated that such decoys, spewed out by ICBMs as they simultaneously lob off their real and deadly payloads, would totally hornswoggle the national missile defenders. Thus the fact that the October 2 test had actually incorporated a penetration aid was an item of especial self-congratulation in the post test victorygrams. However, as the internal Pentagon assessment notes, a single large balloon actually had the (intended) effect of rendering the interceptor's job much easier, since it could spot the "target complex" — target plus big, highly visible balloon—at long range and then, when it came time to decide which to destroy, easily tell the real target from the conveniently dissimilar decoy.

"*The closing velocity was lower than a typical ICBM engagement would have been*"— That is, easier to hit something if it is going slowly. "*The ICBM apogee was higher than most threat ICBM apogees would be. Lower apogees would be more stressing because the NMD system would have less time to react*". This means that they shot the target high into space, making it much easier to spot and track.

Even the Pentagon official in charge of testing admits that it is "untestable".

Such nit-picking doubts and caveats went unmentioned in the public analyses and it is unlikely that anyone bothered to divulge them to the Commander in Chief. Nor, in all likelihood, has anyone bothered to tell Clinton about the grave problems facing the linchpin of the entire missile defense system as presently envisaged. In an artfully cosy phrase, the Pentagon describes Star Wars, Clinton-era version, as a "family of systems", with successive layers of missile interceptors countering anything the North Koreans or the Ayatollahs can throw at us. However, the whole structure depends on a satellite warning and tracking system known as the Space Based Infra Red Systems—SBIRS, or, to the initiated, "Sibbers".

Sibbers, on paper at least, consists of 30 satellites, 6 in high orbit and 24 in low orbit. The six at high altitude would have the function of spotting the enemy missile as it is launched, while those lower down would have to decide (after being alerted by its higher consort) whether an object is a threat, track the missile, discriminate a warhead from decoys, communicate with ground tracking stations and more. Little wonder, as John Donnelly reported in Defense Week a year ago, the $7.5 billion program is growing in cost at the rate of $1 billion a year and that even the Pentagon's official in charge of testing admits that it is "untestable".

Since the 1980s, the U.S. has tried and failed to develop four different warning and tracking networks. The Sibbers program is the fifth, and seasoned observers have no doubt it will follow the fate of its forbears, to be joined by the other components of ballistic missile defense on a costly junkheap. In the meantime however the ABM treaty will probably have been torn up as other prospects for global disarmament, already dim, turned to a distant memory.

Next July, Clinton will be faced with what should be an easy decision. He has promised to announce at that time whether or not to proceed with full scale star wars deployment, which a nervous Pentagon say they might be able to get underway by 2005. The correct answer from the Oval Office should be a resounding "No". But it would be folly to expect such courage from the present incumbent. **CP**

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Meet The Death Trippers: Al Gore and Bill Bradley

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